

Checking in on our future

WHERE DO WE GROW FROM HERE?

SPRING/SUMMER 2001



Picture another Vancouver. Not the city itself, just the number of people who live there. Now picture these people not in a single city but spread throughout various parts of Clark County.

That's what we need to plan for: about 140,000 more people living in Clark County by 2023.

What areas of the county will they live in? What will their homes be like?

What about the services and facilities they will need—the schools, shopping centers, and office buildings? What kinds of roads, bikeways, sidewalks, and other transportation building blocks will help them get around? Where should we build them?

Think of the additional people in Clark County in 2023—not just newcomers but our children and grandchildren. Think of the planning we must do to meet basic needs and ensure that their Clark County is an attractive place to live.

Think about it. How will we get from now to then?



Decisions on growth rate and density set course for look and feel of county

Some of the crucial decisions for how we plan for the additional people expected to live here were made this spring. That's when the Board of Clark County Commissioners wrapped up the first phase of the review of the county's Comprehensive Growth Management Plan.

GROWTH RATE

The commissioners selected an annual population growth rate of 1.5 percent as the basis for updating the comprehensive plan. The state's Growth Management Act requires planning to be based on population forecasts from the state's Office of Financial Management. The rate of 1.5 percent is between the low (1.06 percent) and medium (1.83 percent) estimates from the state.

At this rate the county will have an estimated population of 486,000 by the year 2023, which is the planning horizon for the current update process. As mentioned, this is an increase of about 140,000 residents, or approximately the same number who lived in the city of Vancouver in April 2000. It means we will need to provide housing for an estimated 49,000 additional households.

Although the selection of a growth rate does not actually control the rate

of growth, it drives important planning decisions. For example, it determines how much money will be needed to build roads and how much land will need to be designated for urban development.

Where will the additional people live? Most new homes will be constructed on land that is currently vacant within urban growth areas. Clark County and the cities of Battle Ground, Camas, La Center, Ridgefield, Vancouver, Washougal, and Yacolt will work together to make preliminary decisions about how much additional housing can fit into each area. They will take into account how much land each city has available and how much it would cost the city to provide public services for the additional people. Urban growth areas will be adjusted if more land is needed for development within the next 20 years.

If you would like to see where vacant buildable lands are located—lands within urban growth areas that potentially could be developed—please call Oliver Orjiako, Clark County Long Range Planning Division, at 397-2375 ext. 4098.

DENSITY GOALS

The commissioners also adopted general density guidelines for new housing development that vary according to a city's size. The overall density goal for new development for Vancouver is 8 units per acre; for Battle Ground, Camas, Ridgefield, and Washougal 6 units per acre; and for La Center 4 units per acre. There is no density goal for Yacolt because it does not have sewers, so lots in Yacolt must be large enough to

handle septic systems.

Besides the overall density targets, the commissioners adopted guidelines to encourage a variety of housing. The guidelines say that no single type of housing should make up more than 75 percent of the total. For example, no



more than 75 percent of new construction may be detached single-family homes. This suggests that cities will need to include attached housing such as duplexes, apartments, or condominiums in their housing mix. Living centers for older residents and other people with special needs will probably be part of the mix, too.

The density goals mean that newly developed areas in Battle Ground, Camas, La Center, Ridgefield, and Washougal will see a slight increase in density but probably not enough to affect the local character of these urban areas. Much of the housing constructed in the Vancouver urban area over the last few years has land-use patterns approaching 8 units per acre, so most future housing will not look more dense than recent development.

Overall, the decisions on density are designed to provide a great deal of flexibility. Even within the same city, homes can be grouped together in a variety of ways in different neighborhoods. How development looks will depend on the nature of the land and the choices made by property owners and builders. Each community can reach the goals in its own way to reflect its unique character.

Identifying areas where growth will take place

Once the cities know how many people to plan for, they will begin determining where future development ought to occur. To find out about the cities' decision-making and how areas of interest to you might be affected, please contact the following people:

Battle Ground - Eric Holmes
(360) 342-5045

Camas - Marty Snell
(360) 834-3451

La Center - Eric Eisemann
(360) 750-0038

Ridgefield - Eric Eisemann
(360) 750-0038

Vancouver - Bryan Snodgrass
(360) 735-8873 ext. 8195

Washougal - Monty Anderson
(360) 835-8501

Yacolt - Jim Robertson
(360) 686-3922

Infill: One tool for helping achieve density goals

Infill involves developing vacant parcels of land in urban areas that have been passed over by previous development. An example is building housing on a vacant city lot where there are already many homes nearby. The idea is to efficiently use the land that is available in our urban areas. Sometimes this is land that neighbors view as open space, even though it may be privately owned.

Clark County and the city of Vancouver have established a joint task force that will develop recommendations for an ordinance to guide infill develop-

ment. Its recommendations would apply to the Vancouver urban area and unincorporated parts of the county.

As part of its responsibilities, the task force will look at ways to make infill more acceptable in neighborhoods. This will include measures that would help new development blend in with existing homes.

For more information on the task force and how its decisions may affect your neighborhood, please call Elise Scolnick, Clark County Long Range Planning Division, at 397-2375 ext. 4958.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The commissioners agreed to develop an aggressive plan to attract more family-wage jobs to Clark County so that a higher percentage of county residents can live and work on this side of the river. Greater economic development should also help enlarge the industrial and commercial tax base that is important to local school districts.

Although there is currently a shortage of prime industrial land (land immediately ready for development) in urban growth areas, there is a large inventory of other land designated for industrial purposes. To make these sites available and attractive for companies wanting to expand or relocate here, it may be necessary for the county and the cities to invest in additional infrastructure involving roads, sewer, and water.

Development of industrial sites will likely have a ripple effect. It will generate changes to the areas around them because of the need to provide such things as professional, commercial, and other services that support industrial jobs.

OTHER KEY DECISIONS

The commissioners made other important policy decisions that retain current planning strategies. They include:

■ **Keeping the guideline that 81 percent of growth should occur in urban areas**, using this goal as a monitoring tool rather than a requirement.

■ **Maintaining minimum lot sizes of 5 acres in rural areas**, except in the rural activity centers of Amboy, Brush Prairie, Chelatchie Prairie, Dollars Corner, Fargher Lake, Hockinson, and Meadow Glade.

■ **The Growth Management Act requires counties to re-evaluate the size of urban growth areas every ten years** when they receive updated 20-year population forecasts from the state. However, GMA also allows urban growth boundaries to be adjusted more frequently than that. For such interim adjustments, the commissioners kept the existing policy that says that boundaries can be expanded only when 75 percent of residential and commercial land or 50 percent of industrial land has been developed.



The next steps

In addition to deciding how many more homes will be planned for each urban growth area, the main activities over the next few months will focus on environmental issues and capital facilities such as roads and sewer. The results of this work could affect and change initial decisions about the amount of housing projected for each area.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW – PUBLIC TO HELP ESTABLISH ALTERNATIVES FOR STUDY

Any land-use decisions must take into account the effect they have on water quality, endangered species, and other environmental issues. Based on the policies adopted by the county commissioners, land-use alternatives will be developed for accommodating the growth expected over the next 20 years. The alternatives, which designate where various land uses such as housing, commercial, and industrial development will take place, will be evaluated for their environmental impacts.

One land-use alternative will likely be based on accommodating all growth within current urban growth areas. Another will probably be based on the



What it means...

Each of the county’s cities has an *urban growth boundary*. The land inside that boundary is an *urban growth area*. An urban growth area is where most new development is expected to take place over the next 20 years. Most land inside an urban growth area will eventually look like a city. Most land outside the boundaries will be rural or designated for farming and forestry activities.

preliminary decisions the county and the cities make about where new homes should be located. Additional alternatives may be identified by residents.

Clark County will actively seek citizen input in identifying the various land-use alternatives that should be explored. These alternatives are important because they will be specific about what kind of development will be able to take place in different parts of the county.

This process, which is part of developing an Environmental Impact Statement, is expected to begin this fall. Please watch for information in the local newspapers about how you can get involved. Or add your name to our mailing list (*see below*), and we’ll send you information as it becomes available. If you have questions in the meantime, please call 397-2375 ext. 4993.

CAPITAL FACILITIES – MATCHING NEEDS WITH AVAILABLE DOLLARS

Providing roads, sewers, and other public facilities to meet the needs of more people costs money. The money comes from impact fees assessed on new development and also from city and county funds. The capital facilities analysis will look at our existing infrastructure, determine how much more will be needed, and calculate how much money the additional facilities will cost.

Then comparisons will be made. Depending on the costs for providing specific public services or facilities in different areas, we may want to revisit the preliminary decisions about where development should occur and identify additional land-use alternatives for consideration. For example, if it is very expensive to provide sewers in an area targeted for additional growth, it may make more sense to plan for the population in an area where providing sewers is more cost-effective.

The cities will analyze capital facilities needs for land within their boundaries and for areas they expect to annex within the next six years. Clark County will conduct the capital facilities analysis for the remaining unincorporated area.

Requests for site-specific zoning changes

Now that policy decisions have been made, Clark County will begin to handle requests to consider zoning changes for specific locations. The commissioners will review as many requests as possible this year and next. However, some specific requests will have to wait for final decisions on the comprehensive plan review, expected in 2003.

Property owners who want an answer before 2003 have the option of filing a formal Annual Review application, including the required fee, prior to September 1, 2001. This will guarantee that an application for a land-use change is considered by the Clark County Planning Commission and the Board of Clark County Commissioners in 2002.

For information about potential changes in your area or about the Annual Review, please contact Dale Miller, Clark County Long Range Planning Division, at 397-2375 ext. 4343.

Comprehensive Growth Management Plan

*aka Comprehensive Land-use Plan
aka Comprehensive Plan
aka Comp Plan or Growth Plan*

Regardless of what you call it, in many ways the plan defines the county and how it will look in the future. It has two main parts:

- Written goals and policies give us a framework for making land-use decisions. “Provide for diversity in type, density, and location of housing...” is one broad goal.
- The plan map identifies how land is currently used or what kind of future use is allowed. It also provides a way to coordinate planning for other improvements, such as sewers and roads.

Clark County’s current plan was adopted in December 1994 in response to the state’s Growth Management Act. It requires fast-growing counties to develop land-use plans to meet the needs of people expected to live in those counties over the next 20 years.

The Big Question: will the urban growth boundary be adjusted?

It’s hard to say. The combination of the annual 1.5 percent population projection and the new density goals may allow room for most of the new growth within the current boundaries.

However, until key planning issues are decided—especially the number of homes each urban area will plan for, the Environmental Impact Statement,

and the capital facilities analysis—the question of growth boundary expansion cannot be answered with certainty.

Why does it matter? The size and location of urban growth areas determine how much land will eventually resemble a city. They also play a major role in how those areas will look.

For more information

If you would like to receive up-to-date materials about activities and decisions related to the comprehensive plan, we’ll gladly add your name to our mailing list. You can contact us in the following ways:

- **Information line:** (360)397-2375 ext. 4993; TDD (360)397-6057.
- **E-mail:** compplan@co.clark.wa.us. Please send us your name and e-mail address to be added to our e-mail list.
- **Mailing address:** Comprehensive Plan, P.O. Box 9810, Vancouver, WA 98666.

You can obtain more information about the plan in the following ways:

- **Web site:** through Clark County’s home page at www.co.clark.wa.us. Click on “Comprehensive Growth Management Plan Review.”
- **Columbian Info-line** (for recorded information about upcoming activities): (360)699-6000, mailbox 3632.
- **Speakers:** Call or e-mail us if you would like a speaker to talk to your group about comprehensive plan issues. All you need to do is supply the place and audience.

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Think of the additional people who will live in Clark County over the next 20 years – not just newcomers but our children and grandchildren. Think of the planning we must do to meet basic needs and ensure that their Clark County is an attractive place to live.

Key decisions are setting the direction for where we grow from here. Please read further to find out what’s happened so far, what to expect, and how you can be informed and involved in shaping the future of our community.



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